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## BOOKS ON BURMESE ORTHOGRAPHY

U Tin Hla

Burmese orthography has a long history dating as far back as Pagan period, i.e. 11th century A.D. when Burmese was reduced to writing. The Burmans in upper Burma after coming in contact with the Môn of lower Burma borrowed alphabets from them. These alphabets, no doubt, are of Indian origin, but a modified form I presume, containing 33 consonants and 8 vowels. The presence of long vowels before final consonants in Pagan inscriptions clearly indicates that Burmans also borrowed many Môn vowel sounds. (e.g. ကာနံ၊ ကျောနံ). At present there are more than fifty vowel sounds in Burmese.

Burmese language is monosyllabic, isolating and total and it comprises only verbs, nouns or verbal nouns and many particles. Pure Burmese words are not spelt with the following eight letters of the alphabet viz. ga, gha; ja, jha; da, dha; ba and bha (ဂ၊ ဘ၊ ဘ၊ ခ၊ ဒ၊ ဓ၊ ဝ၊ ဘ။) Linguals ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa and ḷa (ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ) are incorporated into Burmese merely to represent loan-words, mostly Pāli and Sanskrit origin. And pure Burmese words have as their final consonants only ten letters k, ṅ, c, ṇ, t, n, p, m, y and w (က၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ၊ ဇ) A final consonant after a long vowel ကာဘိ၊ ကျောဘိ၊ ကျောဘိ is not recognized, nor are double letters (ဝိဇ္ဇာဇ) treated as Burmese. But there are some pure Burmese words written as if they are Pāli loanwords (e.g. မိတ္တ၊ ယေက္ခာ)

After a comparative study of the pre-standard and standard old Burmese we come to the conclusion that Burmans of olden days wrote as they spoke and vice versa. I am very much convinced to say that there had been very little or no trouble in writing Burmese words. As an Englishman of today pronounces [cut] with final -t sound quite distinctly and [cut] with final -t sound quite clearly so were the Burmans of Pagan days. During my college years I came across many rubbings of stone inscriptions as well as copies of ink writings. To my great wonder I very seldom found a word with final -t which was usually written with final -p (e.g. ကာနံပ). In the same way I very seldom noticed a word with final -n which was always written with final -m (e.g. ဇ္ဇမ). But they could not make clear cut decision regarding the use of medials -y-, -r- and sub-script -l-. Sometimes they wrote medial -y- and sub-script -l- together (e.g. ဇ္ဇလ). At times they wrote medials -y- and -r- together (e.g. ဇ္ဇာ). Although Tavoyans of Tenasserim Division and Taungros of Southern Shan States still retain sub-script -l- sound almost all the Burmans no longer pronounce it.

The Pagan dynasty succumbed to the Tartar's attack in 1278 A.D. After almost a century of disorder and violence it was succeeded by Ava which Thadominbya founded in 1364 A.D. In this period peace and stability prevailed. In this new centre there appeared a new stream of 'book literature' on palm-leaf scratched with a stylus. Six major genres were evolved in this period. Five of these are four syllable lines with regular climbing rhymes. They are (1) historical ballads (ဇာတ်), (2) penegeric poems (မေတ္တဇာတ်), (3) poems on Buddha's Birth Stories (မြို့), (4) lyrical odes on nature and love (ဂုဏ်), and (5) non-generic verses (လင်္ကာ).

Most of the poets of this period seemed to notice that Burmese pronunciation as well as spellings, especially finals, were gradually changing with the passage of time. The use of sub-script -l- was fading away. Sub-script -l- under palatal consonants ka, kha, ga (က၊ ခ၊ ဂ) changed to medial -y- (e.g. က္က > က္ကယ). Likewise sub-script -l- under labial consonants pa, pha, ma (ပ၊ ဖ၊ မ) changed to medial -r- (e.g. ပ္ပ > ပ္ပရ၊ မ္မ > မ္မရ၊ မ္မ > မ္မရ). So we can say that this period, roughly between 1450-1550 A.D. was the transitional period for Burmese orthography. By carefully examining the lithic inscriptions of this period we can guess that learned people of this time were in a state of dilemma regarding Burmese spelling. On the one hand they did have some hesitation in discarding the old form of spelling. On the other hand they could not deny accepting the new form of spelling which was motivated by linguistic change. Therefore poets like Shin Mahāratthasāra (သုဇာတ်သုဇာတ်), Shin Aggasamādhī (သုဇာတ်သုဇာတ်), Shin Tejosāra (သုဇာတ်သုဇာတ်) etc. etc. started laying down concrete foundation for standard spelling in their literary works written in four syllable lines with 4, 3, 2 beat system thus:-

— — — A  
 — — A —  
 — A — B  
 — — B —  
 — B — C . . . . .

By using this 4, 3, 2 beat system the authors were able to include final -t and -p, finals -n and -m etc. whenever and wherever occasion arose. A few examples will suffice:-

Final -t (တထ်)

- § (1) ပေါင်မြေဝင်လျှံတံ၊ ရောက်လာလတ်သော်၊ ချောမွတ်စင်လှ။ ။ သံဝရ \* ဝဇ္ဇာ။  
 (2) ခွဲလေသိတံ၊ အစိစိတံလျှံ၊ ပေါက်ဆိတ်ဖွဲ့ခြင်း။ ။ ပြာဇီ \* ဝဇ္ဇာ။  
 (3) အကြောင်းထက်၊ ဂွာဖွေထက်သော်၊ ချက်ပြုတ်သွားလာ။ ။ မြားပစ် \* ဇဉ်။

Final -p (ပထ်)

- (4) ခနောင်းဝဲစင်၊ တံတိုးကပ်စွဲ၊ ကူးခပ်မသား။ ။ ဂါထာ \* ဂျ။  
 (5) ကောင်းကင်အထိ၊ မွမ်းမွမ်းချိပ်မျှ၊ ဘုန်းရိပ်ရောင်ဖြူ။ ။ ပြည်စုန် \* ဝဇ္ဇာ။

§ Please see full titles at the end of the paper.

(6) မုနီတိုင်း ကတုတ်၊ ဝဲကစုတ်သော်၊ မွေ့ကုတ်သံပတ်။ ။ အဖျို့ \* ၂၃။

Final -n (နသတ်)

(7) စီလျော်သင့်တန်၊ ကမ္ဘည်း ကန့်စို၊ ကာရန်မပျက်။ ။ ပုံတောင် \* ၄၇။

(8) အဝံန့်ငဲ့ပုဆိန်၊ အလေး ချိန်သို့၊ အရှိုန်အစော်။ ။ ဘူလင် \* ၃၀၄။

(9) ပုပြင်း ကဆုန်၊ ဝေါဟာကုန်စို၊ နယုန်ဆန်း တက်။ ။ တန်တား \* ၁၀။

Final -m/-ṁ (မသတ်/ သေး သေး တင်)

(10) စရိုက်မြဲ၊ မကောင်း ကံကို၊ ခွာခြံပယ်ဖျက်။ ။ ဝေဖျို့ \* ၃၃၉။

(11) ကြိုး ကြိုး ပမ်း ပမ်း၊ သင်သောကုန်း ခွဲ၊ ငြိမ်း ချမ်း မဂ်ဖိုလ်။ ။ ဘူပေါင်း \* ၅၉။

(12) တောခြေလုံး ထိပ်၊ ကိုယ်ကိုနှိပ်စို၊ ဆိတ်ငြိမ်ရတော်။ ။ ဆုတောင်း \* ၉၃။

(13) ညီလကံ၊ ဆက်သွား ချံလည်း၊ ရပ်ပုံရေး ခြယ်။ ။ ဘုံခန်း \* ၁၅။

Besides these, learned authors in their four syllable lines intentionally included words written with medial-y- in first line and medial -r- in the second or third line using the same consonant and not disrupting the 4, 3, 2 beat system. We called this ခွဲထား or ဂုဏ်ပင်ခွဲထား. Here are few examples.

(1) ဆီရံသာမကုန်၊ ပေး စား မည်ဟု၊ နှုတ်ခြည်ချီလှ။ ။ သူဇာ \* ၃၀၉။

(2) ဝံ့ချောင့်ကုတ်၊ ဤအဂရိကုတ်၊ ကြိုး ကြွယ်လိမ်လစ်။ ။ မနော် \* ၁၉။

(3) မထိဘေး ဘုန်း၊ ရေနှယ်ချမ်း ချို၊ ဆံခြင်း ဆယ်စိတ်။ ။ ကိုး ခန်း \* ၁၆၇။

After 1700 A.D. literary enthusiasts began to collect excerpts from the famous literary works and compiled spelling books. Firstly we have သတ်ပုံ၊ သတ်သွန်း and သတ်အင်း-spelling books containing words with final killing strokes such as finals -t and -p; finals -n and -m. Secondly we have ခွဲထား or ဂုဏ်ပင်ခွဲထား showing which word we are to use medial -y- (ယပင်) and which with medial -r- (ရဂုဏ်).

By studying the records of Hluttaw (King's Supreme Court), we are given to understand that Burmese kings, especially King Bodawpaya, had from time to time, issued royal orders regarding the use of correct spelling. Copyists on Buddhist literature were not required to serve in the army. They were also exempted from paying any kind of tax to the government. But those who did not write according to the traditional form of spelling were severely punished by the Hluttaw.

In 1879 A.D., i.e. during the reign of the last Burmese king Thibaw, a consultative meeting was held in Mandalay, the then capital of Burma, within the precinct of the Southern Royal Gardens, to scrutinize the books on Burmese orthography prevailing at that time. Twenty eight learned men who were well versed in Burmese language and literature, among them ministers, secretaries, judges and poets, were invited to the meeting. At this meeting the following works totalling thirty six in number were submitted and carefully scrutinized. These are (I)ပင်ငုဏ် ရေး

နည်း သတ်ပုံ (2)မြန်မာသံယောဂဒီပနီ (3)အပင်းရစ်သံပေါက် (4)ကဝိမဏ္ဍနိသတ်ပုံလင်္ကာ (5)ဧကသုဂ္ဂပ  
ကသနိသတ်အင်း (6)ရက္ခိယငယ်ခွဲထားလင်္ကာ (7)လောကဓမ္မရေးနည်းခွဲထား (8)ရေးနည်းသတ်  
နည်းဆုံးမတမ်းစာ (9)ပြည်သူ့ဘေဒနိသတ် (10)အပင်းရစ်လင်္ကာ (11)ဝေဒနာလင်္ကာသတ်ပုံ  
(12)ပင်းရစ်အသတ်လင်္ကာ (13)လိခနာသတ်ပုံ (14)ဝဏ္ဏဗေဒနသတ်အင်း (15)သီရိမင်္ဂလာသတ်ပုံ  
(16)ကဝိလက္ခဏာသတ်ပုံပေါက် (17)ကဝိလက္ခဏာသတ်ပုံနည်း (18)သပ္ပဉာဏ်ချီသတ်ပုံတောင်း (19)ရွှေ  
နန်းတွင်းသတ်ပုံ (20)စွယ်စုံကျော်တင်သတ်ပုံ (21)အက္ခရာသမ္ပဓာနသတ်ပုံ (22)ဂဗဗလသတ်ပုံနည်း (23)ဝိ  
ဘဏ္ဍုပ္ပတိခွဲထား (24)သတ်ပုံနည်းသစ် (25)အသတ်ပေါင်းအစပ်ပေါင်းပယ်ပုံစာတမ်းနှင်းမူလကရန်ဝင်  
စပ်နည်းကရန်ဝင်ငွေယားပုံ (26)ကဗျာသဘာဝတ္ထသင်္ဂဟသတ်ပုံ (27)ကဗျာသဘာဝတ္ထသင်္ဂဟသတ်ပုံနည်း (28)  
ဆကရန္တနယသတ်ပုံ (29)သဒ္ဒါနာယကသတ်ပုံ (30)ပါဠိနာယကသတ်ပုံ (31)ပင်းရစ်ဂဏ္ဌီ (32)ဂတနာ  
ဂြိုဟ်သတ်ပုံနှင်းသတ်ပုံနည်း (33)သတ်ပုံ (34)မြန်မာလေခ (35)ပန်းရွှေသတ်ပုံ and (36)ခွဲထားကျော်.

After a thorough and painstaking scrutinization the meeting handed down a decision. Out of the thirty six works scrutinized numbers 14, 16, 17, 23, 26, 33 and 36 were recommended to be learnt by heart. Numbers 6, 7, 8, 20, 24, 25, 27, 29 and 30 were recommended for reference. Numbers 28 and 32 were recommended only for finals. The rest were rejected as incomplete or biased.

During the British colonial days a man of erudition named U Kyaw Tun, a Deputy Commissioner, compiled a spelling book (ကဝိဗျာနိသတ်ပုံကျမ်း) in 1929. This book was approved by the Text-book Committee as a suitable book for school libraries.

After the Second World War Burma regained her independence in January 1948. From that time on Burmese was proclaimed official language. As such Burmese is written not only by the Buddhist monks and office workers but also by working people of all the national races. Under this circumstance an up-to-date and complete spelling book was badly needed. U Tha Myat, a Deputy Director of Agriculture, compiled a book on Burmese orthography (မြန်မာစာရေးထုံးကျမ်း) in 1948 with a new outlook. The author was able to include spellings of many loanwords. This book, approved by the Text-book Committee, even went to the seventh reprint.

A few years later, Government of the Union of Burma, requested U Wun, Chief Editor of the University Translation and Publications Department, to compile a Burmese Spelling book. U Wun, with his trained staff, collected excerpts from available classical works, especially verses, and consulted almost all the existing spelling books on hand not excepting palm leaf manuscripts. He was able to look through the rubbings of lithic inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava. In the year 1952 (မြန်မာသတ်ပုံနည်းကျမ်း) -A Guide to Burmese Finals - was published. A revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1963 with a new name တက္ကသိုလ်မြန်မာသတ်ပုံနည်းကျမ်း. Unfortunately, this book is good and reliable only for the finals.

U Ohn Shwe, a Pali scholar, in the year 1956 took the opportunity of publishing a large spelling book (သတ်ပုံအဘိဓာန် - မိတ်လင်စုံ) - A Complete Dictionary of Burmese Spelling. It is indeed a large book, good and complete. But alphabetical arrangement of words is not familiar to the ordinary eyes which even amount to confusion.

The Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma instituted 'The Burmese Literary and Translation Commission' in December 1963. One of the main tasks of the commission was to compile a standard spelling book for use in schools and offices. A Sub-committee namely 'The Dictionary and Orthography Sub-committee' was formed with fifteen members headed by U Wun as Chairman.

For the smooth performance of its duties the sub-committee consulted (1) inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava, (2) classical literature in verse where finals and medials are adhered to, (3) Môn as well as dialects of Arakan and Tavoy, (4) all spelling books available including a book on Burmese Philology (ဝေါဟာရဗေဒပညာသင်္ချာ), (5) Pāli and Sanskrit Dictionaries and (6) related papers consequentially submitted by the members of the sub-committee.

Considering the changing nature of language and in conformity with the current usage and modern style of writing the sub-committee, after many deliberations, laid down the following guidelines to tackle the problems of initials, medials and finals.

Previous authors on Burmese spelling had tried, time and again, to solve only the initials pha (ဖ) and bha (ဘ) without success. The matter of initials in Burmese is very wide and therefore very complicating. The word for Buddha is written ပုဂ္ဂ (purhā), ပုဂ္ဂ (phurhā), ပုဂ္ဂ (burhā), and ဘုဂ္ဂ (bhurhā) with four different labial consonants in the inscription of Pagan. Second Kyaw Aung San Hta Sayadaw, the author of Burmese Philology mentioned above, had said 'Purely Burmese words are written with twelve group consonants namely ka, kha, ṇa; ca, cha, ṇa; ta, tha, na; pa, pha, ma' (က၊ ခ၊ င၊ စ၊ ဆ၊ ည၊ တ၊ ထ၊ န၊ ပ၊ ဖ၊ မ). This sub-committee agreed to comply with the word of the Sayadaw. Failing this the sub-committee accepted the current spelling. With regard to initial ya- and ra- the sub-committee relied on the lithic inscriptions and ယေဝ်း as well as dialects of Arakan and Tavoy.

With the exception of Taungros of Southern Shan States and Tavoyans of Tenasserim Division sub-script -l- sound is totally absent among the entire Burmese speaking public. So there is no need to worry about it. But although the majority of the Burmese speaking people no longer pronounce initial r- and medial -r- sound, loan-words excepted, our brothers in Arakan Division still do. There is a Burmese saying (ပင်လယ်မနိင် ရခိုင်နဲ့ငြိ) - meaning 'If you are not sure with medials -y- and -r- better consult with the Arakanese'. For this reason the sub-committee first and foremost consulted the inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava as well as

reliable spellings from ခွဲယဉ်း ကုမ်း. It never overlooked the dialects of Arakan and Tavoy.

Proto-Burmans such as Maru, Letsi and Tsaiwa of Kachin State who formed the tail-end of the Burmese migration into Burma and who retain archaic phonetic features still pronounce final sounds. When the entire Burmese speaking public cease to pronounce final sounds it becomes a perennial problem in writing Burmese words. Undaunted by this, the sub-committee first of all checked the finals in the inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava. Failing to find out a favourable solution the sub-committee looked through various ပျို့ မေတ်ကွန်း၊ ဇေဒ် and ရတု. It also consulted many reliable manuscripts such as ကိလိန္တကဝသတ်ညွှန်း ကုမ်း၊ ကွင်း သင်း သတ်ညွှန်း သစ် and ရတနာဓာတ် ပုံသတ်ညွှန်း. Sometimes the sub-committee had to use its own judgements.

With regard to Pāli loan-words the sub-committee agreed to accept the Burmanised form of spelling but loan-words on Buddhism are to be retained as far as possible.

The sub-committee after 218 sittings submitted the work မြန်မာရေး ထုံး ကျမ်း to the Burmese Literary and Translation Commission in July 1967.

Now in accordance with the wish of the President of the Union of Burma, U Ne Win, for bringing into being a book of Burmese spelling which the majority could accept 'The Burmese Orthography Revising Sub-committee' was formed under the Burmese Language Commission (a new name for Burmese Literary and Translation Commission) to scrutinize and revise the မြန်မာရေး ထုံး ကျမ်း since January 1975. After 126 sittings, the sub-committee submitted the work to the Burmese Language Commission on 15th January 1977 and was approved. The work which was re-named မြန်မာစာလုံး ပေါင်း သတ်ပုံကျမ်း was published in January 1979. It is not a prescribed text-book but considered a book for reference. It would be revised every five or six years on the basis of the advice given and suggestions made by the public.

List of books cited

	Abbreviation	Full Title
(1)	ကိုး ခန်း	ကိုး ခန်း ပျို့
(2)	ဂါထာ	ဂါထာ ခြေဘက်ဆယ်ပျို့
(3)	ဆုတောင်း	ဆုတောင်း ခန်း ပျို့
(4)	ဇေဒ်	မဟာဇေဒ်
(5)	တန်တား	တန်တား ဦး တည် မေတ်ကွန်း
(6)	ပုံတောင်	ပုံတောင် နိုင် မေတ်ကွန်း
(7)	ပြာဋီ	ပြာဋီဟာခန်း ပျို့
(8)	ပြည်စုန်	ပြည်စုန် မေတ်ကွန်း
(9)	ဘူပေါင်း	ဘူရိဒေဝတိ ပေါင်း ပျို့
(10)	ဘူလင်	ဘူရိဒေဝလင်္ကာကြီး

- |      |         |                            |
|------|---------|----------------------------|
| (11) | ဘုံခန်း | နေမိဘုံခန်း ဖို့.          |
| (12) | မနေဘိ   | မနေဘိဟရီဖို့ဟောင်း         |
| (13) | မြားပစ် | သုဝဏ္ဏသုံမြားပစ်ခန်း ဖို့. |
| (14) | ဝေဖို့. | ဝေသာ နှံ့ရသ ဖို့.          |
| (15) | သုဇာ    | သုဇာ ဖို့.                 |
| (16) | သံဝရ    | သံဝရ ဖို့.                 |